Human Leverage: Hostage-taking as a Tactic in Insurgency

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Executive Summary

Title: Human Leverage: Hostage-taking as a Tactic in Insurgency

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Thesis: Seeking the influence to sustain their movements, some insurgent groups in Iraq have employed hostage-taking to generate power and leverage. This paper will argue that the hostage-taking tactic in Iraq is an important component of a well- crafted, culturally symbolic, technologically aware, and often successful information operations campaign that may have increasing value to insurgent movements in the future.

Discussion:
       An examination of past use of hostage-taking by insurgent and terrorists groups is important to better understand the tactic in Iraq. Beginning with the writings of Carlos Marighella, a Brazilian terrorist leader, this study examines the contributions of Palestinian groups, Hezbollah, the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the FARC and Chechen groups to the evolution of the tactic, in order to highlight several important threads both in method and objective that we now see in Iraq.

       The hostage-taking tactic in Iraq has resulted in effects and influence that can be roughly categorized in military, economic, political and informational areas:
•   At a military level, the threat of hostage-taking in Iraq has created significant force protection problems for Coalition commanders at all levels. Small groups of soldiers can neither be employed as effectively, nor maximize their own numbers to provide important presence if constantly guarding against the possibility of abductions. Furthermore, the threat of hostage-taking can also drive military operations in a manner that can give the initiative to the insurgents.
•   The negative economic impact of hostage-taking and other acts of terror in Iraq is difficult to quantify, but there is no doubt that it has hampered the economic reconstruction of the country. Acts of terror, such as hostage-taking, have forced the Coalition to apply greater funds toward maintaining security. This means less money has be directed toward positive reconstruction efforts throughout the country.
•   Identifying the relatively weak public support in many of the coalition countries for the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq, insurgents have used the hostage-tacking tactic to apply political pressure to these coalition governments and their leaders. By deliberately selecting hostages of a non-military nature, the insurgent applies even more pressure to the political bonds holding the coalition together. The tactic has also proven its utility in creating a level of political influence within internal Iraqi politics as well.
•   The primary power and leverage resulting from hostage-taking is informational -- specifically the dissemination of propaganda. The development of economic, military or political leverage is a secondary, albeit welcome, byproduct of this primary pursuit. Hostage-taking insurgents have built

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their propaganda upon a veneer of legitimacy that is intended to influence the opinions and actions of their active and sympathetic audiences. By first arguing normally illegitimate acts are now justified in dealing with invaders, leaders from within these groups buttress their propaganda by skillfully employing existing religious and cultural beliefs, norms and symbols to intensify their message. The selective release of hostages also has been used to enhance the effectiveness of the propaganda. The insurgents have also leveraged the Internet and other mediums to further expand their propaganda's message and effect as well as provide alternative versions of the truth.

Conclusion: Hostage-taking in Iraq has worked to develop power and leverage for its employers in a limited manner and in multiple areas. The tactic is pragmatically attractive to some groups because it can fuse their strategic, operational and tactical goals in a relatively simple, brutal deed that minimizes risk and often produces some sort of result. This tactic is by no means a new one in history. But given the informational power of the Internet, the globalization of future conflict and the characteristics of democratic states, it shows disturbing potential in the future. We should prepare ourselves for more spectacular examples of this old tactic in the future.

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<u>Introduction</u>

In the spring of 2004, U.S. officials warned that insurgent groups might try to take hostages in an effort to degrade the security environment and ongoing reconstruction efforts in Iraq.[1] Such concerns were well founded. On 11 May, an unedited video of insurgents beheading American Nick Berg was made available on the Internet; the impact of this single event was felt outside of the borders of the conflict as western audiences were confronted with a brutal reality. In the following months, a wave of hostage-taking swept over Iraq signaling that this tactic had become an important one for some insurgent groups. U.S. officials have dismissed the hostage-taking tactic as one that was destined to fail in Iraq.[2] Such an assertion is supported by the positions of some experts and historians who argue terrorism as a general strategy to attain major political objectives has a poor track record in history.[3]

But categorizing the success of hostage-taking often depends more on the perspective of its employer than on the view of his adversary. Unfortunately, there are some very pragmatic reasons to employ such a tactic. An examination of the modern employment of hostage-taking shows that it has often produced some concrete, limited success for insurgents in the past. This paper will argue that the hostage-taking tactic in Iraq is an important component of a well- crafted, culturally symbolic, technologically

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[1] This warning came in response to a specific portion of a document allegedly written by Abu al-Zarqawi where he indicated that taking hostages would be part of his tactic. A full transcript of this letter is available at http://www.iraqcoalition.org/transcripts/20040212_zarqawi_full.html.

[2] Ann Scott Tyson, "Hostage-Taking Tests Allies," *The Christian Science Monitor Online*, 13 April 2004, URL:<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0413/p01s04-usmi.htm>, accessed 30 August 2004.

[3] See Paul Wilkinson's, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 22. Also Caleb Carr's *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why it has Failed and Why it Will Fail Again* (New York: Random House, 2002).

aware, and often successful information operations campaign that may have increasing value to insurgent movements in the future.

Definitions and Method:

While the international treaties and moral conventions against the taking of hostages are clear, such conventions and restrictions do not necessarily influence the actions of some insurgents and so may not bar such realities of a conflict. This paper will therefore take an amoral and deliberately pragmatic approach to the tactic of hostage-taking, focusing on the tactic's efficacy in obtaining results for its users. It will then turn to an evaluation of the method and efficacy of this tactic in Iraq, concluding with some predictions and recommendations for the future.

The Department of Defense (DOD) defines terrorism as: "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."[4] The Department of State defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience."[5]

DOD defines an insurgent as a "member of a political party who rebels against established leadership" while an insurgency is "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."[6]

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[4] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, 12 April 2001), 534. Cited hereafter as JCS, Joint Pub 1-02.

[5] United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003* (Washington, DC: GPO, April 2004), xii.

[6] JCS, Joint Pub 1-02, 262.

Terrorism expert Paul Wilkinson defines insurgency as "a relatively value-neutral concept denoting a rebellion or rising against any government in power or the civil authorities."[7]   Thus terrorism is a method of unlawful warfare insurgents can choose to employ in pursuing their goals.

Hostage-taking is a tactic within the method of terrorism. Definitions for hostage-taking in doctrine and literature vary, often depending upon one's view of the intended target and intended effect. The Army's *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the 21st Century* defines hostage-taking as "an overt seizure of people to gain publicity, political concessions or ransom" while kidnapping is "an action taken against a prominent enemy individual for a specific reason."[8] In this definition, the elements that separate hostage-taking from kidnapping are found in its overt nature and its targeting of regular citizens instead of prominent ones. The United Nations defines hostage-taking more broadly as "the seizing or detaining and threatening to kill, injure, or continue to detain a person in order to compel a third party to do or abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the seized or detained person."[9]

In their book *No One a Neutral*, Norman Antokol and Mayer Nudell define kidnapping as "the act of illegally holding one or more persons captive in a secret or otherwise hidden or unknown location." For these authors, hostage-taking is the political form of kidnapping, defined as "the act of illegally holding one or more persons captive

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[7] Wilkinson, 2.

[8] U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Handbook No.1, *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the 21st Century* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army TRADOC, August 2003), 125.

[9] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages," signed 18 December 1979, URL:<http:/www.un.org>, accessed 20 September 2004.

in order to make political demands."[10]   In their view, if the intended result of seizing a

person is purely financial, then the act is kidnapping.

Differentiating between hostage-taking and kidnapping in terms of either targets

or results may be useful in certain cases, but such definitions do not fully describe the

range of goals that insurgents might seek to achieve by employing the tactic.   In his

evaluation of the goals of terrorist groups, Andrew Silke identifies the central dynamic

behind any terrorist tactic, writing "terrorists are under pressure . . . to develop sources of

power."[11]   This paper argues that insurgent groups are under this same pressure and that

they can turn to hostage-taking as a tactic to generate various sources of power and

leverage. DOD doctrine states there are four elements to overall national power:

diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME).[12]   This study will use this

same DIME framework to categorize the general quadrants of power for insurgent groups

with one adjustment.   Because insurgent groups are not officially recognized states, this

paper will substitute the political power of insurgent groups (P) in place of the diplomatic

aspect of state power (D).

Using this framework and taking the perspective of an insurgent, hostage-taking is

a tactic involving the seizure of people in order to increase political, informational,

economic, and military power and leverage. By design, this working definition is less

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[10] Norman Antokol and Mayer Nudell, *No One a Neutral* (Medina, OH: Alpha, 1991), 23.

[11] Andrew Silke, "Beating the Water: The Terrorist Search For Power, Control And Authority," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 81.

[12] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of The United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, 14 November 2000), I-5.

concerned by the target of the tactic or its legitimacy and is more focused upon its intended result.

The Modern Evolution of Hostage-Taking

To better understand the hostage-taking occurring in Iraq, an historical review of the evolution of the tactic is necessary. While hostage-taking is a terror tactic with deep roots in conflict, this overview will illustrate the general evolution of the tactic in method and goal over the last 50 years, concentrating on its central aspects with application in Iraq and the future.[13]

Hostage-Taking as a Component of Urban Insurgency

Carlos Marighella, a Brazilian terrorist leader of the 1960's, was among the first to formally articulate a place for the hostage-taking tactic within a larger campaign of urban insurgency. His *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* serves as a useful starting point to better understand the tactic, its goals and method in an insurgency.

Marighella viewed hostage-taking as a legitimate component of what he described as the "war of nerves" between the urban guerrilla and the government.[14] The hostage situation highlights the inability of the government to provide security for its own and, like other acts of terrorism and violence, it brings psychological and political pressure to bear against the government. This in turn compels the government to do something to stop the tactic, creating additional opportunities for the guerrilla to exploit. False

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[13] For a wider overview of the use of hostages in history see Antokol and Nudell (note #10) Chapter 1.

[14] Carlos Marighella, "Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla," in Robert Moss's *Urban Guerrilla Warfare- Adelphia Papers #79* (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1971), 36.

information relating to a hostage event can be given to the government by the insurgent to further erode the resources and will of authorities.[15]

Though employing a tactic of terror to advance his cause, Marighella was still cognizant of the importance of gaining support and legitimacy for his movement. In employing the hostage-taking tactic, Marighella clearly stressed the public must view the choice of victim as symbolic of the larger struggle in order to sympathize with the act.[16] Thus target selection for the hostage event had a dual aspect the insurgent had to keep clearly in mind. The first and most important targeting consideration was the target audience -- those the insurgent was trying to influence through the tactic. The second targeting consideration was the intended hostage himself. The physical target of the act was only the means to influence the larger and more important target. Therefore, Marighella argued that the physical targets should be representatives of the government's authority: policemen, businessmen and government officials. If the targeted audience did not view the selected target as legitimate, the larger message would be lost and the insurgent would risk damage to his own cause.

For these reasons, Marighella viewed the generation of propaganda as a primary contribution of hostage-taking and other acts of violence to the insurgent cause.[17] The use of a violent act to communicate to a wider audience is a central tenet of terrorist method - often called "propaganda by deed". This tenet holds that an act of violence does little to influence an audience unless it is publicized appropriately. To this end, Marighella

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[15] Marighella, 37.

[16] Marighella, 34.

[17] Marighella, 36.

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emphasized the creation of a "clandestine press" within the capabilities and resources available to the insurgent, designed to influence an audience.[18] To further enhance the effectiveness of his propaganda, Marighella highlighted the utility of religious leaders who support the insurgency because such figures have " a special ability to communicate with the people."[19]

Marighella did not view hostage-taking, nor other acts of intimidation, as ultimately decisive in the struggle against the government. Instead, such a tactic sets the conditions for more decisive operations by draining government resources and will, while simultaneously gaining wider support of the people.   Marighella's aim with the tactic was primarily the development of political and informational power in what he saw as a zero-sum propaganda war with the government. He saw his target audience as being within the borders of Brazil.   While his insurgent movement employing terror tactics such as hostage-taking ultimately failed, other insurgents would employ similar ideas and methods with more success.

Hostage-taking as an Internationalized Tactic: The Palestinian Contribution

Unable to compete militarily with Israel and seeking their own state, Palestinian insurgents turned to terror tactics designed to generate interest, publicity and support for their cause among the international community. Planned hostage-taking incidents, primarily in the form of skyjackings, became the hallmark of their campaign in the late 1960s and 1970s.

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[18] Marighella, 36.

[19] Marighella, 42.

On 22 July 1968, Palestinian terrorists hijacked an El Al airliner, subsequently negotiating the release of sixteen of their group from Israeli custody. Over the next years, this tactic would be repeated in the air and on the ground, as Palestinian groups targeted not only Israeli nationals, but also citizens from nations in the West. While occasionally the demands of the hostage-takers were met in some fashion, such demands were really secondary to the larger, more important goal: publicity. With each event, world attention was generated along with an increasing awareness of Palestinian political goals.

Antokol and Nudell argue that George Habash, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), contributed two key elements to the evolution of hostage taking as well as other terrorist tactics.[20] First, Habash widened the scope of who might be considered a legitimate target saying, "he who takes no interest in politics gives his blessing to the prevailing order, that of the ruling classes and exploiting forces."[21] With this view, conceptions about who is a "non-combatant" or "combatant" blur to a point of irrelevance: essentially anyone can be considered a legitimate target of hostage-taking. Secondly, Habash argued any revolutionary group could be enlisted for action in another's cause. Thus an internationalization of possible targets was mirrored by a corresponding internationalization of insurgent groups with generally similar grievances.

Habash and the Palestinian insurgency correctly identified that television was a tool that could be used to leverage the publicity from a hostage-taking event into growing political awareness for their cause. This central role of the visual mass media in

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[20] Antokol and Nudell, 57.

[21] Antokol and Nudell, 64.

magnifying the impact of hostage-taking deserves close scrutiny. With television

providing the free stage upon which to stand, insurgents were now able to communicate

to an international audience rather than a local or internal one. The size of this audience

was beyond anything Marighella might have imagined. For example, the 1972 Black

September seizure of Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics was broadcast to an

estimated world audience of over 500 million.[22]

The televised hostage situation itself had many of the trappings of a TV drama as

people from all over the world could watch the event develop and resolve. By watching,

this audience became effectively involved if only in a passive sense. The sheer spectacle

of some of these events became a perverse form of entertainment, as viewers tried to

anticipate what might happen next. Such anticipation created a story that television was

sure to cover; coverage meant publicity; and publicity meant the Palestinian hostage-

takers were effectively delivering their propaganda well beyond the borders of their

political situation to an audience that might have no previous knowledge of their cause.

Another important aspect emerging from the Palestinian use of hostage-taking is

the symbiotic relationship between fringe insurgent groups willing to employ acts of

terror like hostage taking and more moderate groups with similar political goals. Larger

political organizations, seeking legitimacy, can use smaller, more obscure groups to do

their colloquial "dirty work", while keeping a level of plausible deniability between

themselves and the "terrorists" they do not publicly condone.[23] The Palestine Liberation

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[22] Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence As Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage, 1982), 3.

[23] Philip Jenkins, *Images of Terror: What We Can And Can't Know About Terrorism* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2003), 97-99. Also Antokol and Nudell, 69-70.

Organization did not need to take hostages to benefit from them; instead a fringe element with similar goals, Black September, executed such operations. The more legitimate groups can enjoy the larger publicity and propaganda effect that groups employing terror generate without feeling the negative political impact normally associated with acts of terrorism.

While difficult to draw direct causal lines, many experts agree that the tactic of hostage-taking and other acts of terror were effective in achieving some of the initial goals of the Palestinian cause. According to terrorism expert Ariel Merari, "There can be little doubt . . . that in the last count, terrorism has had a beneficial rather than deleterious effect on the PLO's legitimacy."[24] Ironically, the employment of a conventionally illegitimate tactic – hostage-taking – had developed successful propaganda garnering legitimacy for the larger cause. The Palestinian use of hostage-taking had "operationalized" and internationalized the tactic to an extent not see before and showed how it could be employed in the beginning stages of insurgency to gain legitimacy.

"A Superpower Chained": The Iran Hostage Crisis

On 04 November 1979, Iranian militants broke into the U. S. Embassy in Tehran, seizing 52 Americans and demanding the return of monies the disposed Shah had taken from their country. Over the next 444 days, a hostage drama played out in the world press, pitting a small group of militants against the might of a superpower. American military, economic and diplomatic power was shown to be unable to gain the release of their citizens. After a failed military rescue attempt, and facing increasing domestic

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[24] Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 214.

pressure, American officials began secret negotiations with the militants. The hostages

were finally released after the U.S. agreed to various financial concessions.[25]

Any U.S. economic concessions paled in comparison to the symbolic victory the

Iranians achieved through a hostage event. The leaders of this event have since stated the

hostages were an unintended byproduct of what was originally conceived as a purely

political protest, not an act of terror.[26] Regardless of their original intent, these militants

demonstrated to anyone interested that a superpower could be simply, effectively, and

publicly confronted through the lives of its own citizens. The Iranian Hostage Crisis

captured world attention, placed the United States in a position where its vast military

advantage could not be effectively employed, and produced results for its employers.

The Individual Hostage Drama: Hezbollah in Lebanon

In the years following the Iranian Hostage Crisis, Hezbollah employed their own

variation of the hostage-taking tactic to develop leverage and power during the war in

Lebanon. Unlike more spectacular skyjacking events where the location of the incident

was purposely overt to maximize mass publicity, Hezbollah targeted individuals, almost

exclusively foreigners, who were held for extended periods of time in undisclosed

locations. From 1982 to 1992, Hezbollah or other insurgent organizations operating in

Lebanon seized over 90 foreign hostages.[27] The insurgents sent videotapes to authorities

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[25] Pierre Salinger, *America Held Hostage: The Secret Negotiations* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 294.

[26] "Remembering the Iran Hostage Crisis," *BBC News Online*, 04 November 2004, URL:<hhtp://news.bbc.com.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/3978523.stm>, accessed 16 January 2005.

[27] See Antokol and Nudell pages 181-188 for a by- name listing of known foreign hostages taken in Lebanon up until 1989.

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and the press depicting the helplessness of the hostage's situation and thus heightening the visual drama and pressure on the various governments to resolve the situation. In essence, the tactic created individualized foreign policy crises for each state involved as governments tried to gain the safe return of its citizens without compromising its stated policies in the region.[28]

By 1992, Hezbollah had effectively stopped using the hostage-taking tactic in Lebanon. Some argue that this was an indicator of the success of the U.S. policy of "no negotiation" for its hostages. Supporting this theory, Terry Anderson, the Associated Press reporter held hostage in Lebanon for seven years, recalled a conversation he had with one of his captors just prior to his release in 1991. Anderson remembered one of his captors telling him, "This has not been a useful tactic. We're not going to do it anymore. We'll do other things, but not this."[29] But in his detailed examination of Hezbollah's use of the hostage –taking tactic, Magnus Ranstorp argued that the reason why Hezbollah stopped taking hostages was due more to a positive transition of its own political power and legitimacy than any effective U.S. policy. Ranstorp maintained that Hezbollah stopped using the tactic because it had gained enough legitimacy in internal Lebanese politics as well as external relations with Iran and Syria that being associated with the tactic no longer made sense.[30] Ranstorp's explanation is congruent with the view of the Palestinian results and decision about the tactic as well. What seems clear is that the employers of the tactic are focused on results: they are coldly pragmatic and will use the

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[28] Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah In Lebanon* (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), 108-109.

[29] Terry Anderson, "Painful Lessons: Hostage-Taking And U.S. Foreign Policy," *Harvard International Review* 20, no. 4, 1998: 65.

[30] Ranstorp, 108-109.

tactic if it has the promise of effect and will jettison it if it does not work or becomes a liability.

The lessons from Lebanon for anyone intent on using hostage-taking in the future would seem clear: 1) taking individual hostages can generate sufficient publicity if properly selected; 2) the hostage situation suffocates without drama and immediacy; 3) the utility of hostage-taking to the insurgent group decreases as its own power and legitimacy increases. The insurgent must create sufficient crisis through the tactic to compel action from his adversary. The situation must be a spectacle that cannot be ignored.

Hostage-taking for Economic Gain: The FARC in Columbia

While the pursuit of political goals and propaganda is often the dominant goal of the tactic, hostage-taking can be very economically profitable for an insurgent group as well. This economic benefit from the tactic should neither be overlooked nor dismissed. Illustrative of the value of human currency to an insurgency is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC). During the 1980s and 1990s, a veritable industry developed in Columbia based upon the seizing and ransoming foreigners by FARC forces as well as other groups within the state. The resulting income from hostage-taking in Columbia was considerable: some reports from the 1990's estimated that as much as 165 million dollars per year in ransoms was paid.[31] Such monetary success meant that this industry was destined to grow: according to study done by an insurance company in 1999, kidnappings for ransom in Columbia were up 70% over the previous eight years.[32]

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[31] "International Desk: Hostages: A Growing Trade," *The Economist*, 21 August 1999, 37.

[32] "Leaders Desk: The Price of Paying Ransoms," *The Economist*, 2 September 2000, 17.

Even today the FARC continues to employ hostage-taking as an important tactic in their campaign against the Columbia government. While they have been able to gain economic profit through the tactic, it has not as yet proved effective in gaining real political power vis-à-vis the Columbian government.

A Tactic in Modern Warfare: The Chechen Conflict 1994- Present

Faced with impending military defeat at the hands of the Russians in the summer of 1995, Chechen insurgents turned to a systematic campaign of mass hostage-taking deliberately designed to target the public opinion of its adversary. Planned in detail with considerable command and control, these hostage-taking operations were executed in the fashion of military raids in areas deliberately outside of Chechnya's borders.

On 14 June 1995, Shamil Basayev, a notorious Chechen insurgent leader, led the first of these hostage raids in the Russian town of Budennovsk. Over a period of six days, Basayev and 100 Chechens held over 1500 people hostage in a hospital, demanding that the Russian government withdraw their forces from Chechnya. To prove their ruthlessness and intent, the Chechens killed some of their captives, while releasing others in an attempt to show leniency and a willingness to negotiate.   After several botched Russian rescue attempts, Basayev gained concrete concessions from the Russian government including the cessation of combat operations in Chechnya and the safe passage of the hostage-takers back to Chechnya.   In a propaganda victory of considerable proportions, Baseyev's direct phone negotiations with Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin were broadcasted on television to the Russian public. [33]

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[33] Raymond Finch, "A Face of Future Battle: Chechen Fighter Shamil Baseyev," *Military Review 77*, no. 3 (June-July 1997), 36-38.

Thanks to Russian mishandling of the situation and the relative instability of internal politics at the time, Russian public opinion focused more on the poor handling of the hostage crisis by the Russian government than it did on the terror tactic of the Chechens. Russian Duma members approved a non-binding resolution of no-confidence in President Boris Yeltsin by a vote of 241-70 just two days after the conclusion of the affair.[34]

Encouraged by the success of the tactic and the Russian inability to deal with it strategically, Chechen insurgents struck again at Kizlyar on 09 January 1996 when approximately 2000 hostages were taken. Again the hostage-takers demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya. While the Chechen hostage-takers were eventually killed or captured, several of the hostages were killed as well during the government's response. Russian handling of the entire affair was again widely criticized.[35]

The shift in Chechen tactics towards mass hostage-taking raids changed the scope of the conflict by bringing the war's brutality beyond the borders of Chechnya to the citizens of Russia and the surrounding provinces. Chechen leadership saw such tactics as legitimate; Basayev justified his deliberate targeting of non-combatants as a proper and unavoidable response to the brutal tactics the Russians had employed to seize Grozny.[36]

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[34] "Reformers and Revanchists Vote No Confidence in Yeltsin," *Russia Reform Monitor*, no. 23 (23 June 1995), URL:<http://www.afpc.org/rrm/ rrm23.htm>, accessed 29 December 2004.

[35] Brent Sadler, "Chechen Rebels Survive, Prolong Hostage Crisis," *CNN Online*, January 24 1996, URL:<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9601/chechen_rebels/01-24/>, accessed 30 December 2004.

[36] Sumner, Dianne, "Success of Terrorism in War: The Case of Chechnya," Naval Postgraduate School: Monterey, CA, 1998, 14.

While the Middle Eastern hostage-situations were designed to generate publicity for the cause and to pressure a third party government not directly involved in fighting, the Chechen variation was a significant departure from the traditional tactic because they employed the mass hostage situation as an integrated tactic within their more traditional military operations. It was not only a ruthless tactic to generate publicity and fear, but was also a supporting effort for other military operations. The tactic was a modern version of violent propaganda, aimed at convincing the Russian public and government that continuing its policy in Chechnya was not worth the lives of so many. Some have argued these hostage situations along with other acts of terror were central to the Chechen victory in the 1994-1996 war.[37] At a minimum, the tactic played a central part in substantially degrading Russian public support for the war, thereby gaining concessions such as the withdrawl of Russian troops from the province in 1996.[38]

Chechen insurgents continue to employ hostage raids to the present date, and these events continue to be marked with a level of brutal ruthlessness and timing that is signature of their method in the new millennium. The October 2002 Moscow theatre siege was another attempt to highlight to the Russian people that the conflict in Chechnya was continuing, even though Russian President Vladimir Putin had announced the previous April that the war in Chechnya was officially over.[39] The deeply disturbing Chechen hostage-raid involving hundreds of school children in Beslan in September 2004

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[37] This is the thesis of Sumner's cited above.

[38] Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 14.

[39] Tony Karon, "Behind the Moscow Theater Siege," *Time Magazine Online*, 25 October 2002, URL:<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8816,383909,00.html>, accessed 09 January 2005.

is only the most recent example of this Chechen tactic being employed.   Clearly, the

Chechen insurgents continue to believe that such tactics will eventually produce results.

Hostage-Taking and the Modern "Clandestine Press": The Internet

As illustrated, the need to communicate to a greater audience has been central to

the success of insurgent hostage-taking, and this need has adapted to the technology

available. Palestinian and Lebanese employers of hostage-taking in the 1970s and 1980s

recognized that they could co-opt television to broadcast their violent propaganda. This

recognition was crudely summarized by a skyjacker who once remarked, "Television is a

whore. Any man who wants her full favors can have them in five minutes with a

pistol."[40]

But while colorful, this observation is not entirely true. Television producers and

reporters are not in the direct employ of those practicing terror. They still have the option

to refuse to give coverage to an event. Furthermore, television stakeholders can also

censor or edit what they broadcast as well as provide opposing views of what they decide

to present. Broadcast television is also subject to regulation by governments and requires

a considerable level of equipment and infrastructure to support it. These characteristics

make the medium of television neither effectively clandestine nor fully malleable, two

properties any insurgent propagandist might seek.

In the technology and characteristics of the Internet, the insurgent finally has a

clandestine media tool that is more servant to the master, is capable of global reach, and

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[40] Schmid and de Graaf, 34. See also Brigitte Nacos's *Mass-Mediated Terrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) for a more recent analysis of the often symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the mass media.

helps to magnify the hostage-taking event as well as other acts of terror. In a study of

how such groups utilize the Internet, Gabriel Weinmann identifies several "great virtues

of the Internet: ease of access, lack of regulation, vast potential audiences, and fast flow

of information."[41]   Utilizing the Internet also carries with it practically no cost in

comparison to other forms of mass communication. These characteristics all make the

Internet a valuable tool for pragmatic insurgencies as well as pragmatic hostage-takers.

The Chechens were among the first insurgents to maximize this new medium to

their ends. From the beginning of their war with Russia in 1994, Chechen leadership

saw the primary purpose of the mass media in aiding with the war effort, not for

providing news.[42] While aggressively engaging world opinion through traditional news

media, the Chechens also utilize the Internet to get propaganda out on the world stage.

Violent video of ambushes against Russians, and even individual executions of Russian

soldiers, was combined with other, non-violent propaganda on such websites. And the

use of the Internet by insurgent groups was by no means limited to Chechnya. During

their 1996 hostage raid at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Peru, the Tupac

Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) used their website to broadcast real-time

video, interviews and other propaganda.[43]

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[41] Gabriel Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report 116*, March 2004, URL:<http:// www.usip.org>, accessed 15 October 2004.

[42] T.L. Thomas, "Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russian & Chechen 'Information War' Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict," in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Camberley, Surrey: Conflict Studies Research Center, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 2000), 116.

[43] Kelly R. Damphouse and Brent L. Smith, "The Internet: A Terrorist Medium For The 21st Century," in *The Future of Terrorism: Violence In The New Millennium*, ed. Harvey W. Kushner (London: Sage, 1998), 215.

Today, the use of the Internet is practically a requirement for any serious insurgent movement. With its real-time capability, the Internet provides insurgents a way around the difficulty faced by Hezbollah in the individual hostage cases in the late 1980's. Now they can provide up-to-date video of their captives in a graphic, unfiltered manner, an open invitation to serious analysts, voyeurs and anyone else in between. Because the mainstream media is so concerned about getting a story first, by putting this propaganda in their own private Internet sites, the insurgents ensure that it will get coverage in more mainstream media. Even if restricted, such coverage means that others not normally drawn to the insurgent website will be more likely to visit it to see for themselves. The Internet allows the insurgent a way to insert the drama of the hostage-situation without the direct help of the mainstream media and without the necessity of a barricade situation.

An Evaluation of Hostage-Taking Prior to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

Historical review of the tactic shows several important threads both in method and objective necessary to analyze the ongoing hostage-taking occurring in Iraq. First, hostage-taking has overstepped national borders with the advent of the media age, bypassing even the boundaries of traditional mass media in the form of the Internet. Second, it has evolved to include anyone as a potential target. Third, it has been used by leaders within the framework of a larger military campaign. Fourth, employers of the tactic are increasingly interested in featuring their brutality and are often less concerned about how this brutality might play out in conventional public opinion. Finally, the hostage-taking tactic has shown utility. It certainly generates publicity but also can produce some economic and political benefits. This means the tactic has and will have a place in the repertoire of insurgency.

An Analysis of Hostage-Taking in Iraq

After a short description of the method of hostage-taking in Iraq, an analysis of

the efficacy of the tactic in producing power or leverage will follow using the DIME

framework of national power introduced earlier. Due to currency of this topic and the

desire to keep this paper at an unclassified level, sources for this section are heavily

reliant upon the open media as well as interviews with government and military officials.

Furthermore, the reader will note that clearly separating the effects of hostage-taking in

Iraq into clear categories poses some challenges as a single hostage can often result in

effects applicable to multiple categories.

Data and Method

According to an 11 March 2005 Brookings Institution report, various groups

inside Iraq have taken over 189 foreign hostages since May of 2003 (see Table 1). [44]

Over 46% were abducted during a three-month period from July to September 2004.

Hundreds of Iraqis have also been taken hostage, but data to capture the exact extent of

these numbers is even more problematic as these abductions often go largely unreported

in the western media.

Not all the insurgent factions operating against the U.S.-led Coalition use hostage-

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[44] Some reports put this number higher or lower. See "Iraq Hostage: Facts and Figures," BBC *News Online*, 22 December 2004, URL:<http://news.bbc.co.uk/gp/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/3662562.stm>, accessed 29 December 2004. Exact data on all hostages taken in Iraq is difficult to come by due to varied media reporting in addition to security classifications. The 11 March 2005 Brookings Report is the most up to date this author has found.

taking as a tactic, but for those that do, the method has been relatively similar.[45]   The

physical targets of the tactic include representatives of the Iraqi Government, anyone

seen in collusion with U.S. forces, foreign contractors and support personnel aiding in the

reconstruction of the country, even family members of these targets have been taken.

Insurgents have targeted some hostages because they see them as useful in influencing

politics and arrangements within the borders of Iraq. They have targeted others because

they see them as useful in influencing external politics and arrangements. Knowing the

insurgent groups will pay for foreign hostages that are representative of the coalition

states, criminal gangs in search of simple economic profit often conduct the actual

abductions, trading this human currency to the more notorious groups such as those

affiliated with Abu al-Zarqawi.[46]

Insurgent hostage-takers have been quick to publicize their actions through

multiple media venues in immediate and often graphic ways. Insurgents provide

videotape of foreign hostages, usually to Arab media networks such as Al-Jazeera, and

place these same videos on their websites as well. To effectively reach those audiences

within Iraq without access to Internet or television, insurgent groups have mass produced

CD's and VHS tapes of their actions, making these available in street markets.[47]

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[45] See Samir Haddad and Mazin Ghazi, "Who Kills Hostages In Iraq?," September 19 2004, FBIS
Translated from *Al Zawra* (Baghdad), URL:<http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2004/09/az091904.html>,
accessed 02 December 2004.   This article is a valuable outline of the various insurgent groups operating in
Iraq as of September 2004.

[46] Christopher Allbritton and Walt Vivienne, "How to Free a Hostage," *Time*, 19 July 2004, 56.

[47] John F. Burns and Erik Eckholm, "In Western Iraq, Fundamentalists Hold U.S. at Bay," *New
York Times*, 29 August 2004, 8.

Military Power and Leverage

While the effects of the hostage-taking tactic are often best described in areas of propaganda and publicity, insurgents in Iraq have produced some military leverage through the tactic as well. Whether this leverage was originally intended by the tactic is difficult to trace, but even unintended leverage has been capitalized upon. Such military leverage against U.S.-led forces can be described in operational as well as tactical terms.

The threat of hostage-taking in Iraq has created significant force protection problems for commanders at all levels in Iraq. Understanding the political impact of having servicemen taken by insurgents, commanders were forced to respond to this threat by allocating larger forces to guard against it. In a world where resources and manpower are scarce, allocation of personnel to guard against hostage-taking means fewer servicemen able to support vitally important reconstruction missions. Small groups of soldiers can neither be employed effectively, nor maximize their own numbers to provide important presence if they are constantly guarding against the possibility of abductions. Likewise, plans to station units out in the population where they can live and work, a central aspect to counter-insurgency, can suffer from the force protection issue created by a concern of seeing a service member on the six o'clock news.[48]

Furthermore, the threat of hostage taking can drive military operations in a manner that can give the initiative to the insurgents. Knowing our concern about hostages, insurgents or sympathizers to their cause can provide false intelligence concerning hostages in order to disrupt other operations, or to expose Coalition units to kinetic

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[48] The information in this paragraph comes from Colonel James A. Toolan, USMC, Director Marine Corps Command and Staff College, interview by the author, 21 December 2004.

attack. This combination of the psychological, asymmetrical nature of the hostage can be combined with more standard kinetic attack producing synergy for the insurgent.

The brutal execution of hostages could create the political pressure to take military operations in reaction that might work counter to larger U.S. interests and objectives. The killing and desecration of the four contractors in Fallujah in April 2004 arguably produced such a result. Faced with political pressure to do something in response to the killings, kinetic military operations were employed too soon in Fallujah in the opinion of some senior military commanders.[49]   This same political pressure could result from the psychology of a brutal mass hostage event as well. The Iraqi insurgent can utilize the psychological and political pressure generated by hostage-taking, or even the threat of it, to weaken and frustrate his adversary. Such a result can support his larger operations and can help to generate initiative.

Economic Power and Leverage

In Iraq, the economic power and leverage benefits generated by insurgents through hostage-taking can be described as either positive or negative. First, there is the positive economic benefit of any ransom that can be extracted for the hostage, even though the primary goal of the tactics is to gain publicity or to change some policy. Secondly, there is the negative economic impact that the tactic has had on the economy of the new Iraq itself.

As previously stated, criminal gangs in Iraq have taken hostages to profit from their relative worth to more politically motivated groups such Zarqawi's. The

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[49] Christian Lowe, "Corps Top General In Iraq Criticizes Handling Of Fallujah," *Marine Corps Times*, 27 September 2004, 10.

going price for a hostage in September ranged from 10,000 to 100,000 dollars according to Andrew White, the director of the Iraqi Center for Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace.[50] While the companies employing the hostage usually pay ransoms, governments are not excluded from this economy. The Italian government reportedly paid one million dollars for two Italian aid workers in December of 2004.[51] While such funds may not be important to insurgent groups with outside support, they represent a powerful incentive for other groups to employ the tactic.

The negative economic impact of hostage-taking and other acts of terror in Iraq is difficult to quantify, but there is no doubt that the threat of hostage-taking has hampered the economic reconstruction of the country. A State Department expert working in Baghdad during November and December 2004 reported:

> Currently, common citizens are not showing up for work due to intense fear. Basic public services suffer immensely, and the economy is not able to rebound, even though this country has immense natural resources. Hostage taking is a major contributor to this intimidation, along with the bombings and associated murders of prominent officials.[52]

Acts of terror such as hostage-taking require the Coalition to apply greater funds toward maintaining security meaning less money can be directed toward positive reconstruction efforts throughout the country. Some reports indicate that in September 2004, as much as 30% of initial funds intended for reconstruction were going to shore up security.[53]

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[50] Allbritton and Vivienne, 56.

[51] Jeff Israely, "Simona Pari and Simona Torretta," *Time Europe Online*, 11 October 2004, URL:<http:www.time.com/time/europe/magazine>, accessed 02 January 2005. While the Italian government continues to deny it, the emerging consensus is that a ransom was paid for the two.

[52] U.S. State Department Counterterrorism Official, email interview by author, 17 November 2004.

[53] Paul Richter, "Costs Whittle Funds To Iraqis," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 2004, 1.

Political Power and Leverage

To evaluate the political effect of hostage taking in Iraq, it is useful to separate the hostage-taking incidents into two basic categories: 1) those taken hostage to influence internal political arrangements and 2) those abducted to influence external political arrangements. The latter group has received the largest amount of outside press coverage, but the former category has had more impact on the lives of Iraqis.

Internal Political Impact:

On July 28th, a group allied with Zarqawi abducted the three sons of the acting governor of Anbar, demanding the governor repent and resign or face the death of his children. The governor conceded. The insurgents videotaped him making an official statement about how wrong he was to work for the "infidel Americans", capturing his emotional reunion with his sons as well. This humiliating tape was broadcast on 6 August 2004 and copies were being sold in marketplaces within the province for just 50 cents.[54] On August 13th, Suleiman Mar'awi, the commander of the newly formed Fallujah Brigade, was abducted and beheaded. This tape was also for sale in the province, and many of the members of the brigade and other Iraqi National Guard members in the area fled due to other threats against themselves and their families.[55] Similar tactics were employed in Ramadi.[56]

Such tactics created a vacuum of power in places like Fallujah into which

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[54] Burns and Eckholm, 8.

[55] Burns and Eckholm, 8.

[56] Alissa Rubin, "Iraqi City On Edge Of Chaos," *The Los Angles Times*, 28 September 2004.

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insurgent groups could move and develop nascent legitimacy among the population. Reports in Fallujah indicated that Zarqawi and a militant Islamic Cleric named Abdullah al-Janabi filled the security role at the street level by establishing a Taliban-like rule of law.[57] This has included punishing criminals in Fallujah -- thus attempting to establish their own brand of security while highlighting the inability of the coalition to do the same. Zarqawi's notoriety, primarily developed through well-publicized hostage-taking, has worked to give him a place at the table in the power dynamic between the various insurgent groups inside Iraq. [58] Other groups inside the insurgency as well as the Coalition itself must publicly deal with him: this is the beginning of political clout and leverage.

External Political Impact

Even if the insurgents employing hostage-taking have not read Sun-Tzu, they clearly would agree with his maxim that it is better to attack alliances than armies.[59] Insurgents have identified the relatively weak public support in many of the coalition countries for the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq as a critical vulnerability that hostage-taking is particularly suited to attack. This in turn exposes the political bonds between the U.S. and other members of the coalitions. With this in mind, insurgents understand that the physical target of hostage-taking need not be, and indeed might preferably not be, military members whose violent death can be portrayed as necessary by their

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[57] Burns and Eckholm, 8.

[58] Michael Ware, "Inside the Insurgency," *Time*, 27 September 2004, 42-43.

[59] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B Griffin (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 78.

governments. By deliberately selecting hostages of a non-military nature, the insurgent

applies even more pressure to the political bonds holding the coalition together.

The most clear and direct example of success with this tactic is Philippine

President Gloria Arroyo's concession to an early withdrawal of Philippine military forces

and police forces in order to gain the release of Angelo de la Cruz, a truck driver taken

hostage in July 2004.[60] While in their internal struggle with Ab-Sayyaf the Philippine

government has practiced a "no concessions" policy, the public and political will did not

exist to extend such a policy overseas. With only 50 soldiers in Iraq, the tangible military

impact of the Philippine withdrawal was inconsequential. But the symbolic and political

effect was substantial and showed the insurgents that their estimation of the strength of

the coalition was relatively weak. In seven days following the negotiated release of de la

Cruz, there were 13 more foreign abductions, a 100% increase for the month of July and

a pragmatic nod to the efficacy of the tactic.[61]

Identifying the direct impact of hostage taking in relation to the Philippines or to

private companies is relatively easy because they conceded to the demands of the terrorist

insurgent. But what about a coalition partner who refuses to concede? Is there still an

impact even if a country faithfully stays the course?

The individual hostage drama of Briton Kenneth Bigley, underscores the political

potential of the hostage-taking tactic to influence a coalition partner whose public support

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[60] "A Dangerous Gamble," *The Economist*, 17 July 2004, 43.

[61] See Dan Murphy's "Abductions Surge in Iraq," *The Christian Science Monitor Online*, 27 July 2004, URL:<http://www.csmonitor.com>, accessed 24 August 2004, in conjunction with Table 1 of this document. Also Ian Fisher's, "2 More Hostages Seized, but Progress Reported in Talks for Release of 7 Others," *The New York Times*, 1 August 2004, 10.

for involvement in Iraq was not strong to begin with.[62] On 16 September 2004,

Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad group abducted Bigley from his Baghdad home along with

two Americans, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong. The group beheaded the two

Americans within the week, after the Coalition government refused to meet the demands

of the insurgents that all female Iraqi prisoners be released. Unlike the Americans, Ken

Bigley's drama continued over the next three weeks because the hostage-takers found his

life still had utility in bringing pressure against British Prime Minister Tony Blair and

influencing British public opinion. Two videos were released of Bigley pleading directly

to Prime Minister Blair. With a vigor that could only have pleased his brother's captors,

Paul Bigley directly accused Blair of leading Britain to a path in Iraq that led to

Kenneth's abduction. Calling for Blair to step down and intoning that the Prime Minister

would have "blood on his hands" if his brother was killed, Paul Bigley made his political

views about the war known to the media with great frequency, bringing increased

personal pressure upon the Prime Minister. [63] His captors eventually killed Ken Bigley

on 7 October after he tried to escape.

In terms of internal and external politics, Zarqawi and his group have gained in

relative influence. While certainly he has gained infamy through bombings and other

acts of terror inside Iraq, his external renown is due in large part to his

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[62] Practically every member of the coalition has been subject to this tactic. The case of Ken Bigley is chosen to illustrate the effect on Britain and is roughly illustrative of the political dynamic for other countries.

[63] Paul Bigley's attempts to gain his brother's release were well-covered by British tabloids and especially in Bigley's hometown of Liverpool.   For Liverpool coverage, see Deborah James and Alan Weston, "PM 'Kiss of Death' For My Brother," *Liverpool Daily Post* 27 September 2004, URL:<http://icliverpool.icnetowrk.co.uk>, accessed 28 September 2004.   For an evaluation of the situation from an American perspective, see Glenn Frankel, "Hostage Case Turns Britain's Focus Back To Iraq," *Washington Post,* 24 September 2004, A20.

well-publicized, carefully-crafted hostage dramas and executions. In some regards, this notoriety seems to be paying off by garnering Zarqawi external recognition and support from Bin-Laden's al-Qaida group.[64]

Informational Power and Leverage

Most evaluations of the hostage-taking tactic in Iraq have properly focused on the informational and specifically psychological aspects of the hostage-taking tactic.[65] The primary power that insurgents taking hostages are focused upon is informational-specifically the development of propaganda. The development of economic, military or political leverage is a secondary and welcome byproduct of this primary pursuit. DOD defines propaganda as "any form of communication in support of national objective designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly."[66]

Hostage-taking as a form of propaganda can be better understood by identifying the audiences it is trying to influence. In her work, *Terrorist Propaganda*, Joanne Wright outlines three basic types of audiences for insurgent propaganda: the uncommitted audience, the sympathetic audience and the active audience.[67] The uncommitted audience consists of those not historically nor ideologically associated with

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[64] Larry Margasak, "Bin Laden, Al-Zarqawi Benefit In Alliance," *Seattle Post- Intelligencer*, 28 December 2004, URL:<http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/national/apwashington_story.asp?category=1152& slug=Bin%20Laden%20Alliance>, accessed 28 December 2004.

[65] See Anthony H. Cordesman, "Hostages, Murders, and Desecrated Corpses: Iraqi Political and Psychological Warfare," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 11 April 2004, URL:<http://www.csis.org>, accessed 15 October 2004. 6., or Brian Michael Jenkins, "World Becomes The Hostage Of Media-Savvy Terrorists," *USA Today*, 23 August 2004, 11.

[66] JCS Joint Pub 1-02, 427.

[67] Joanne Wright, *Terrorist Propaganda* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 77.

the insurgency. According to Wright, this audience includes: 1) the general public of the country in which the terrorist group is operating; and 2) international public opinion. The sympathetic audience consists of those who already have a "broad historical or ideological sympathy" with the expressed political aims of the insurgent. This particular audience may not necessarily approve of the tactic of some insurgents, but may approve of the cause. The active audience consists of the members of the insurgent group itself and represents the base that must be energized through violent acts.

The effective propagandist constructs his message in a fashion that can communicate to all three audiences in a meaningful manner. This means that it must take into account the beliefs, cultures and general opinions of all three audiences in order to trigger the desired response. Insurgent hostage-takers in Iraq have shown this ability in many regards.

Generating Legitimacy For Violent Propaganda

Hostage-taking insurgents have built their propaganda upon a veneer of legitimacy that is intended to influence the opinions and actions of their active and sympathetic audiences. By first arguing normally illegitimate acts are now justified in dealing with invaders, leaders from within these groups buttress their propaganda by combining both religious and *real politic* justifications. In his declaration of war against the U.S., Bin Laden himself sets this stage writing:

> Clearly . . . there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the Holy Land. [and] . . . . the ultimate aim . . . is to fight the enemy, in every aspects and in a complete manner . . . even if the intention of some of the fighter [sic] is not pure . . . or if they do not observe some of the rules and commandments of Islam.[68]

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[68] Osamah Bin Laden, *The Ladenese Epistle: Declaration of War Part I*, found at *The Washington Post Online* at www.washingtonpost.com, accessed 06 October 2004.

Abu al Zarqawi has also attempted to build legitimacy for extreme tactics and measures, arguing ". . . right and wrong no longer have any place in our current situation" with regards to the civil war he is trying to start between Sunni and Shia.[69] Religious leaders with interpretations of the Koran that support the actions of these groups are employed as well to provide ideological support for such actions.

Insurgents further attempt to gain legitimacy for the tactic by leveraging existing beliefs, especially among the sympathetic audience. World opinion of U.S. involvement in Iraq is deeply divided, and in the Arab world it is deeply negative.[70] This negative portion reflects the pool from which the insurgent sympathetic audience can be drawn. While disapproving of the hostage-taking tactic in general, this audience is the one most inclined to be receptive to the insurgent "ends-means" justification for it.

The characteristics of the Internet can help create and support hostage-taking legitimacy as well. Scholars have noted that the Internet creates a different forum in which to argue a version of political reality.[71] Others have noted that there is a tendency of many to accept much of the information they receive on the Internet as true.[72] Taking advantage of these effects, active and sympathetic audience members can create a dialogue online about the legitimacy of taking hostages under the circumstances, providing arguments that can justify it.

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[69] *The Zarqawi Transcript*, 12 February 2004, found at www.cpa-iraq.org, accessed 07 October 2004.

[70] The Pew Research Center, "A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust Of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists," 16 March 2004, 5-6.

[71] Harry M. Cleaver Jr., "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and The Rise of An Alternate Political Fabric," *Journal of International Affairs* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 637.

Leveraging Hostage Release To Support Propaganda

Often in Iraq, insurgents have released hostages without their demands having been met because such release can generate effective propaganda. In August 2004, insurgents released American hostage Micah Garen, after Moqtada al-Sadr intervened on his behalf. The insurgents publicly stated Garen's release was appropriate because he was covering subjects not flattering to U.S. forces in Iraq.[73] In this case, the propaganda message to the sympathetic audience is that the employers of this tactic are rational and are looking out for the interests of the Iraqi people. The release puts a more compassionate face on insurgents who are as ruthless as any. Another example of this propaganda positioning from hostage taking can be found in the abduction of Margaret Hassan, the British C.A.R.E. executive in Iraq. After learning of the abduction, Zarqawi's group was careful to publicly state that they had nothing to do with it and that if Hassan was delivered to them, they would release her.[74]

A slightly different example of beneficial propaganda from a release can be seen in the remarks of Simona Torreta, one of the two Italian aid workers released in late September 2004. Upon her release and in a show of gratitude possible only in a free

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[72] Lorenzo Valeri and Michael Knights, "Affecting Trust: Terrorism, Internet And Offensive Information Warfare," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 16

[73] "Kidnapped Reporter Freed in Iraq," *BBC News Online*, 22 August 2004 at http://news.bbc.co.uk, accessed 20 December 2004.

[74] "Group led by al-Zarqawi Calls For Release of Hostage," *Associated Press*, 5 November 2004, from *MSNBC News Online*, URL:<http://www.msnbc.com/id/6336322>, accessed 20 November 2004. If Zarqawi truly intended to make good on this pledge, he might have been better served to not publicize it, obtain Hassan, and then release her for greater propaganda effect.

society, Torretta took the time to denounce Italian involvement in the war saying, "the guerilla war [in Iraq] is justified."[75]

Leveraging Culture and Symbolism to Support Hostage Propaganda

The hostage execution videos are excellent examples of propaganda as well, containing components of symbolic violence and cultural violence at the same time to intensify the message. Using Koranic verse to justify their actions with elaborate scripts prepared to get their point across, the executioners brand the hostage an "infidel" or as in collusion with infidels. The insurgents often dress the doomed in an orange jumpsuit, meant to recall the images of Guantanamo Bay detainees in the minds of their audiences. Finally, they often execute the hostage by beheading.[76] The graphic manner of execution is meant for shock value to the uncommitted audience, while evoking legitimate connections to traditional Islamic law for other audiences.[77] If we remember that the hostage-takers are as concerned about communicating effectively to multiple audiences, the utility of such associations become clear. Such choices in method, visual images,

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[75] Jeff Israely, see note # 51. In later comments, Torretta clarified that she did not think hostage-taking or acts of terror were justified, but given the perspective of the insurgency's sympathetic audience, the damage was probably done.

[76] Not all hostages have been beheaded. In some cases, such as the 12 Nepalese drivers executed in August 2004, only one was beheaded and the rest were shot. The symbology is still clear.

[77] Some experts identify the justification for such executions in interpretation of Koranic verse calling for death to those who "spread mischief in the land" by committing treason or apostasy. For further information about this area see *Islam Online,* http://islam.about.com/cs/law/a/c_punishment.htm. The argument about the legitimacy of taking hostages and killing them by beheading under Islam has occupied a small place in the public debate during the latter half of 2004 (see *Time Magazine's* "The Struggle Within Islam" and "Does the Koran Condone Killing?" 13 September 2004 for an example of the argument). Such debate about a tactic so abhorrent speaks volumes about the extent of the cultural divide between many in the Middle East and the West. This divide becomes the free space in which insurgent propagandists can conduct their information operations.

and audio scripting make this particular brand of violence more propaganda than mere brutality.

An Evaluation of Hostage-Taking By Insurgents in Iraq

A Tactic With Varied Utility

Hostage-taking has worked in Iraq in a limited manner, and in multiple areas, to further the power and leverage of its users. On a psychological level, it is a culturally aware, technologically-enhanced propaganda tactic and thus an integral component of an insurgent information operation. On a tangible physical level, insurgents can employ hostage-taking to support their economy force or shaping efforts on the ground by forcing their adversaries to respond.

Hostage-taking in Iraq can produce gains for its employers in a manner that traditional kinetic violence cannot. A bombing, a sniper or other types of a conventional attack in insurgent warfare have utility; but such events can be managed and handled by authorities in a manner in which the urgent drama of a hostage situation cannot. Acts of terror such as bombings do not contain the drama of decision that a hostage-situation does. The hostage tactic can be tailored, scripted and drawn out to an extent that a more conventional insurgent attack cannot. The hostage drama gives the insurgent a modicum of control when he may have control over little else. Finally, the hostage tactic can force a dialogue from an adversary that does not want to talk. Through hostage-taking, insurgents can create a public dialogue that is often difficult for their adversaries to ignore.

A Tactic To Expand the Network of Combatants

With the aid of various regulated and unregulated media, hostage-taking can functionally expand the network of participants in a conflict from the willing to the unwilling, the active to the passive, potentially expanding the impact of what might otherwise be a very geographically limited conflict. The hostage tactic in Iraq has placed businesses, individuals, and governments into positions where they cannot easily ignore the ramifications of their actions, or inactions, in relation to larger political issues.

A Tactic To Target Coalitions

The hostage-taking tactic in Iraq is well-suited as an anti-coalition weapon. It can be used to target the political bonds between allies, or the public support bonds between a citizen and his or her government. Clearly, bombings and traditional insurgent tactics can accomplish the same effect. But the hostage event can put pressure on the agreements between states in a manner that is potentially more dramatic, more personal and more explicit.

A Tactic To Target Aspects of Democracy

Hostage-taking as an insurgent tactic is particularly well-suited to exploit the nature of a democratic government because it forces leaders and representatives to publicly assign value to the life of one of their constituents. Because the option to negotiate or concede is always an option - even if policy forbids it- the hostage tactic pressures a leader to make public decisions about lives in a fashion that other tactics do not. The hostage event becomes a form of foreign policy crisis pitting a government's

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policy against the safety of its citizens.[78] Because democracies assign so much worth to

the individual, this can be used to determine the resolution of a leader, a government, or a

public. This is Marighella's "war of nerves."

Hostage-taking is also suited to take advantage of a free society's press. The

mass media can serve to magnify the effect of the hostage event while simultaneously

limiting a government's response to it. Brigitte Nacos outlines this dilemma in

evaluating the impact of the free press on Yelstin's options in dealing with the mass

hostage situations during the first Chechen War:

> If this had happened in the Soviet Union of old, the Kremlin could and probably
> would have ended the hostage situation with military might regardless of the
> hostages' fate. But with a free press broadcasting TV pictures of desperate
> hostages and their families all over Russia and the world, President Boris Yeltsin
> had to consider and actually deal with the domestic and international reactions to
> his crisis management and especially to the use of force.[79]

Even when attempting to deal with such situations forcefully, a government is likely to

receive substantial criticism.

A Tactic With a Shelf Life

Because of its strongly emotional content and generally cowardly nature, hostage-

taking may not be a sustainable propaganda tool. It has utility to insurgencies at specific

times and places, but is limited as a centerpiece tactic. This tactic is suited to achieve

their initial information warfare goals or to jumpstart interest and attention if needed. It

is not suited for long term sustained application. Such a tactic will be used when

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[78] Ripstorp, 7.

[79] Brigitte Nacos, "After the Cold War: Terrorism Looms Larger As a Weapon of Dissent and Warfare," *Current World Leaders* 39, no. 4 (August 1996): 22.

publicity is needed, or when an adversary's reaction- or more accurately *over*reaction- is desired.

Can Hostage-Taking Produce Decisive Results?

In his work, *The Age of Terrorism*, Walter Laqueur notes "where terrorism has been successful, its aims have usually been limited and clearly defined . . . . [O]r when used within the framework of a wider strategy."[80] The history of hostage-taking supports this thesis. The tactic works best when it is used to extract concessions on a policy that an entity is already weakly attached to, from governments without strong public support for a policy, or when a government and its public are not prepared for such a tactic. Hostage-taking has not been successful if concession to it directly threatens a vital interest. This is most likely why the tactic has had little political success within the borders of Columbia: any concession threatens the survival of the government. But in situations where support of a policy is weak, hostage-taking has the potential to achieve gains at relatively low-cost.   It is a tool of the militarily weak but ideologically committed against the militarily strong but ideologically diffuse.

Propaganda as a Means to Victory?

Clausewitz indicated that public support is an asset ultimately gained by great military victories.[81] Hostage–taking as a component of a larger insurgent campaign turns Clausewitz on his head by arguing that influencing public opinion through propaganda

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[80] Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little Brown, 1987), 75.

[81] Carl von Clausewitz*, Principles of War*, trans. Hans Gatzke (Harrisburg, PA : Stackpole, 1960), 46.

might come first.[82]   When military victory is impossible or unlikely, symbolic victory is an intermediate or initial object to the insurgent. Using the tactic of hostage-taking can serve this goal in a unique way and under certain circumstances. It can produce a propaganda victory rather than a military one.

In his study of the tactics of the Provisional IRA in the 1970s, Maurice Tugwell proposed that violent propaganda can be a decisive factor in some unconventional wars by producing an "asset-to-liability shift."   Violent propaganda, Tugwell argues, becomes the primary insurgent weapon designed to convince his adversary that "something [a policy, a territory, or the right to govern] which was at the outset . . . . regarded as an asset worth fighting for . . . [is now] . . . a liability to be dropped."[83] Instead of concentrating on military victories that cannot be achieved, the insurgent focuses instead on generating propaganda designed to change the priorities, perceptions and opinions of various audiences. In this manner, the insurgent hopes to achieve decisive results for his cause. In Iraq, hostage-taking has been a particularly effective way of generating this type of propaganda, but it is still too early to determine its final impact.

A Possible Scenario?

Insurgents are under pressure to continually improve their repertoire of violence because their intended audiences may become desensitized to old methods.[84] The most likely terrorist scenarios discussed by U.S. officials involve kinetic attacks with

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[82] Schmid and de Graaf, 1.

[83] Maurice Tugwell, "Politics and Propaganda of the Provisional IRA," in *British Perspectives on Terrorism*, ed. Paul Wilkinson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 17.

[84] Schmid and de Graaf, 34.

explosives or WMD against symbolic targets or population centers. Such an attack

would certainly generate enormous publicity for its perpetrators and would represent, in

the case of WMD employment, a worst-case scenario.

But if insurgents were more interested in achieving limited goals in Iraq or in the

larger Middle East, such an unlimited attack could work against their goals by

galvanizing their adversary's populations instead of fracturing them. A well-timed,

mass-hostage situation targeting Westerners, either within our own borders or inside the

borders of our allies, would promise substantial publicity, direct political pressure, and

symbolic victory at a time when American public support for involvement is waning.[85]

Ignoring a properly planned and targeted mass hostage incident would be politically

impossible for any member of the Coalition, including the United States, to ignore. Such

an incident, or the faulty handling of it, might provide the impetus that further breaks

American public opinion rather than coalescing it like a 911 style attack would. Such an

attack would only reinforce the opinions of those who see the war as necessary while

hardening the stance of those who think it is folly. Such polarization is good for the

insurgent with limited goals.

Such a mass hostage incident would most likely mimic the method of the

Chechens – well-planned, politically-timed and brutal. Some might see this predication

as a stretch and argue that the tactic employed in Beslan was unique to that situation,

resulting from the stark brutality with which the Russians themselves treated the Chechen

population. Others will doubt its feasibility and point to the effectiveness of our security

[85]According to a Pew Research Center Poll conducted in December of 2004, U.S. public support for U.S. involvement in Iraqis at its lowest level since the U.S. intervention in March 2003. See The Pew

apparatus in preventing terrorist attacks on our own soil in the years following 911. But if we believe insurgents and terrorists are pragmatic and view success on their own terms, they have the Chechen use of the tactic as an example to follow rather than one to discount. Conducting military operations specifically to obtain hostages is now part of the insurgent repertoire in Iraq. They are willingly to fight and sustain casualties in order to gain human currency.[86] Such operations have not been limited to the borders of the conflict: reports of the 06 December 2004 attack at the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah indicate that this attack was specifically intended as a hostage-taking operation.[87] Furthermore, the hostage situation generates publicity in a manner that other events do not. According to a Pew Poll, the number four highest interest news story to Americans in 2004 was the hostage-situation in Beslan, beating out the terrorist bombings in Madrid.[88] The more human drama the insurgent can create, the more interest he can command from various audiences. The more interest in these audiences the insurgent can command, the greater potential for persuasion, influence and leverage.

Research Center, "Public Opinion Little Changed By Presidential Election," 20 December 2004, www.people-press.org, 10.

[86] "Gunmen Seize Six Hostages In Iraq," *BBC News Online,* 2 November 2004, URL:<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/3972569.stm>, accessed 27 December 2004.

[87] Brain Ross and Jill Rackmill, "Consulate Attackers Wanted U.S. Hostages," *ABC News Internet*, 16 December 2004, URL:<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/337793>, accessed 27 December 2004.

[88] The Pew Research Center (note #85), 4.

Recommendations and Conclusions

An Adjustment of Mindset

Hostage-taking is primarily a tactic of psychological warfare. In war, where military force is usually the aspect of national power most visibly employed, many are conditioned to see kinetic effects on targets as indicators of success.   But often the effects of hostage-taking do not exist primarily in this physical realm of war and require a certain recalibration to understand and counter them.

The Central Importance of Information Operations

As Anthony Cordesman has astutely observed, "Political and psychological warfare must be fought on political and psychological terms."[89] This means a robust and calculated information operation should be employed not only to mitigate the impact of such events should they happen, but more importantly to reduce their occurrence or deter them altogether. Often aided by visual images, the hostage situation creates its own version of insurgent reality- and therefore its own portrayal of their "truth". While we need not accept this version of reality, we can neither discount nor dismiss it. Given the relative success that the tactic can garner, the new face of war mandates that we take steps to combat it.

Understanding that communication is a central aspect of this violence is a valuable theoretical starting point for the development of an information operation designed to counter insurgent propaganda. Wright's concept and categorization of audiences may be a useful framework for leaders and planners alike. [90]   The

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[89] Anthony H. Cordesman, 6.

uncommitted and sympathetic audiences are the likely targets to which the information

operations should be directed, as those in the committed audience are far less susceptible

to influence. If successful, the information operation would reduce the size of the

sympathetic audience and the support the hostage-takers need to operate freely in the

community will erode or dissolve altogether.

Tugwell's "Asset to Liability" framework provides another potentially useful way

in which to think about the design of an effective counter information operation. Is there

a policy or tactic that the insurgency sees as an asset that our information operations can

shift to a liability? Arguably, hostage-taking itself is just such a tactic. Groups doing this

in Iraq see the tactic as one that has produced power and leverage for them in the past.

As this study has argued, they have been partially correct. But it also seems that the

tactic has the roots of its own demise embedded within it. Spurred on by the pressure to

create more spectacular hostage-events, these insurgent groups may go too far with the

tactic and only serve to alienate the very audiences they are trying to persuade. It is most

likely that the tactic will wear thin on those in the Iraqi public who are tolerating it. To

speed up this process, the savvy friendly information campaign should be relentlessly

directed towards highlighting the actions of the hostage-takers, not ignoring them.

Friendly information operations should also be directed to erode the loose

alliances that exist within the larger insurgency itself. According to some, there is also

difference between those groups in the insurgency who are willing to practice hostage-

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[90] For another categorization of audience types instead of Wright's, see Chapter 4 of R. Kim
Cagin and Scott Gerwehr's, *Dissuading Terror: Strategic Influence and the Struggle Against Terrorism*
(Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), 59. In this work, the authors pose three audiences in the Muslim world
which can be influences to reduce terrorism writ large: the Terrorists themselves, the Radical Institutions
supporting them and the Sympathetic Communities around them. I prefer Wright's framework because it
takes a wider, more encompassing view of the entire range of potential audiences.

taking and those who reject it as legitimate.[91]   There are reports of this rift appearing

between Iraqi insurgent nationalist groups and those with a more radical Islamist agenda

like Zarqawi's.[92]   Michael Vlahos, a scholar at the Johns Hopkins Joint Warfare Analysis

Department, identifies a possible source of this rift by categorizing two different and

competing types of insurgents within what he sees as a larger Islamic insurgency. The

first type, termed the "Wilderness Ghazi", are representative of insurgents associated

with the mythic, culturally symbolic, literary tradition of Islam and are embodied most

clearly today in organizations like al-Qaida. The second type, termed the "Civil Militia",

are representative of the local community warrior organizations rooted in Islamic

history.[93]   Vlahos argues that these two groups have conflicting views of Islam and that

historical Islam has usually marginalized mythic "Ghazi" Islam. Such a rift between

these approaches to Islam should be highlighted by information operations.

Part of this information operation must include the media. Experts have long

noted the symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorist practitioners.[94]   Others

persuasively argue that the media has essentially become an instrument of warfare in the

modern era.[95]   Clearly, those who employ hostage-taking and other acts of terror

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[91] Haddad and Ghazi, (note # 46).

[92] "Iraqi Insurgents Fear bin Laden's Moves," *Associated Press*, 12 January 2005,
URL:<http://www.cnn.com/2005/world/meast/01/12/iraq.bin.laden.ap/index.html>, accessed 12 January
2005.

[93] Michael Vlahos, *Two Enemies: Non-state Actors and Change in the Muslim World*, Monograph,
Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, January 2005), 1-
2.

[94] Wilkinson, 175.

[95]Kenneth Payne, "The Media as an Instrument of War," *Parameters* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 81.

understand this to be true.   If we agree the media increases the impact of hostage-taking, then the media can and should be leveraged to counter it.

The idea of using the media to support an information operation is one that deserves clarification because establishing a direct connection between information operations and public affairs can imply manipulation and disinformation. Manipulating the media through falsehoods should not be the object of any information operation. Aggressive engagement with the media to counter the propaganda of the hostage-takers with the truth of the situation and the friendly viewpoint should be. This is part of the information operation and has nothing to do with deception or manipulation. If we do not counter the message of the hostage-takers aggressively in the media, we cannot complain if their propaganda takes root.

Psychological Preparation for the Warfighter and the Public:

The psychological distress created by hostage situations can be considerable for the public as well as for members of the military, even though they may not be directly involved.   This stress can be combated to at least some degree through preparation and education. Our citizenry and our servicemen and women must understand that such tactics have been and will most likely continue to be a brutal, difficult byproduct of any conflict in the future.

With such preparation and understanding, the emotional urge to respond can be better controlled. During the Beslan school siege in September 2004, Russian troops held as many as 40 relatives of suspected perpetrators, including members of Shamil Basayev's family in reprisal.[96]   We should not employ similar tactics. Such a response

appeals to the emotion, but violates the intellect. It will only undermine the long-term success of any friendly information campaign.

Final Remarks

Some may find comfort in the remarks of Terry Anderson's captor regarding the failure of hostage-taking in Lebanon, believing hostage-taking is an ultimately ineffective tactic. But this insurgent's words do not necessarily mean that hostage-taking itself is ineffective, but rather that the style and method of hostage-taking they employed at that time did not work. The remarks do not indicate a lack of will, but rather a coldly pragmatic evaluation of the tactic at that point in time and in that situation.

While hostage-taking and the brutal execution of hostages clearly goes beyond what most think is acceptable regardless of religious leaning, the sympathetic and active audiences for this type of propaganda may be larger than we want to believe. The hostage-taking tactic employed by some insurgent groups in Iraq has been productive in generating propaganda for their cause and has been employed on many occasions in a careful, logical and pragmatic manner.

The taking of hostages is by no means a new idea in the history. But given the informational power of the Internet, the globalization of future conflict and the characteristics of democratic states, it shows disturbing potential in the future. The tactic is pragmatically attractive to some groups because it can fuse their strategic, operational and tactical goals in a relatively simple, brutal deed that minimizes risk and often leverages some sort of result. We should prepare ourselves, as warfighters and citizens, for more spectacular examples of this old tactic in the future.

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[96] Kim Murphy, "During School Siege, Russia Took Captives In Chechnya," *Los Angeles Times*,

**Table 1: FOREIGN NATIONALS ABDUCTED IN IRAQ SINCE MAY 2003**

07 September 2004, 1.

* According to news reports (see note # 61), 13 of these abductions occurred in the seven days after the 20 July release of Angelo de la Cruz.

Month	# of Foreigners Abducted	Status
Date of capture unknown	14	11 unknown, 3 killed
May 2003-October 2003	0	
November	1	1 released
December 2003- March 2004	0	
April	43	3 killed, 30 released, 2 still held, 1 escaped, 7 status unknown
May	2	1 killed, 1 still held
June	3	2 killed, 1 escaped
July	26*	3 killed, 13 released, 6 still held, 1 rescued, 1 escaped, 2 unknown
August	30	15 killed, 15 released
September	31	4 killed, 4 released, 22 still held, 1 rescued
October	8	3 killed, 2 released. 1 still held
November	5	1 killed, 4 still held
December	2	2 still held
January 2005	13	8 released, 5 still held
February	10	3 still held, 7 released
March	1	1 still held
Total through March 10, 2005	189	33 killed, 84 released, 47 still held, 3 escaped, 2 rescued, 20 status unknown

Source: "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," *The Brookings Institution*, 11 March 2005, 12.

Graph 1: Number of Foreign Nationals Abducted by Month Since March 2004
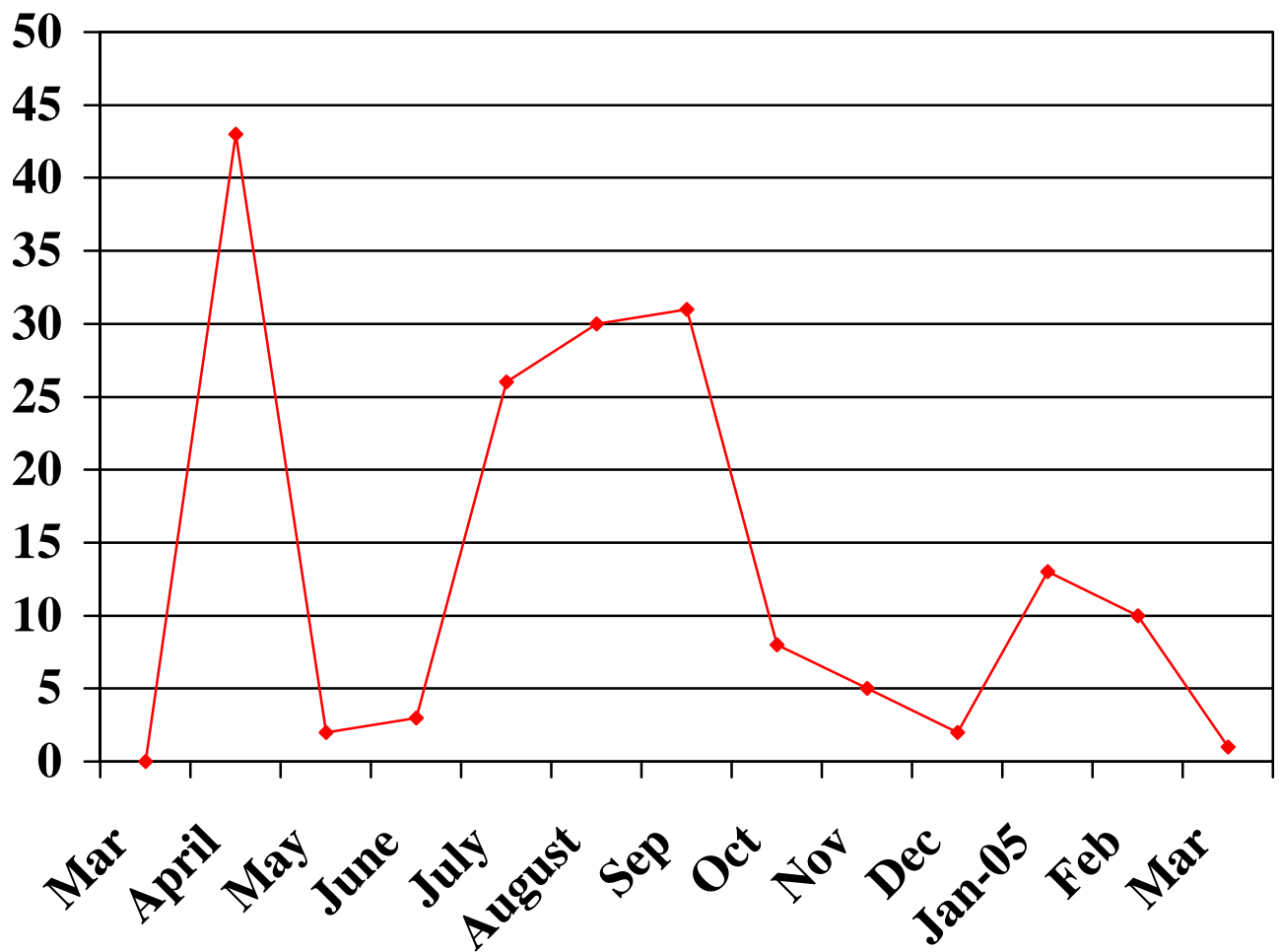
Source: "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam
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